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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000968

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/11/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: PSUV MEMBERSHIP DRIVE STARTS SLOW, PICKS UP WITH  
BRV HELP

REF: CARACAS 000820

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES,  
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary. Over one million voters have reportedly joined President Chavez' United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) during the first three weekends of party registration. With only three more weekends left in the PSUV's initial membership drive, the PSUV may fall short of Chavez' outsized goal of organizing some four million voters, but is still on track to become Venezuela's largest political party. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) is actively supporting the new party with National Electoral Council (CNE) supervision, promotion through government media outlets, and pressure on public employees to join. The BRV is also almost assuredly providing direct manpower and financial assistance to the drive. Chavez continues to blast the leaders of three pro-government parties that have not yet dissolved, and is citing Marx and Trotsky as model sources for PSUV ideology. The extent to which Chavez is already blurring the distinction between his government and the PSUV bodes poorly for the future of democracy in Venezuela. End Summary.

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Slow Start  
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12. (SBU) Registration for Chavez' single "revolutionary" party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), kicked off April 29 in Caracas and Lara State. The National Electoral Council (CNE) is overseeing the registration of new party members, including digitally scanning members' fingerprints at public venues, mostly schools. By Chavez' own admission, first-day party registration was plagued by technical problems and a relatively poor turn-out. Only some 80,000 persons, including Vice President Jorge Rodriguez and Lara Governor Luis Reyes Reyes, formally joined the PSUV on the first day of registration. Chavez has suspended his Sunday television broadcasts of "Alo, Presidente" until June 10 in order to avoid "competing" with PSUV registration drives.

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Up-tick in Second and Third Weekends  
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13. (SBU) PSUV registration continued May 5 and 6 in Caracas

and Lara State and opened for the first time in the states of Zulia, Cojedes, and Miranda. According to Vice President Rodriguez, over 600,000 persons formally joined the PSUV by May 6. President Chavez drove to the "23th of January" neighborhood of Caracas May 5 in his red Volkswagen beetle (a pre-election gift from Defense Minister Baduel), registered for the party, and gave an on-site press conference to plug his new party. VP Rodriguez led a delegation that supervised party registration in Zulia. Government-run television stations provided ample coverage of PSUV registration both days and flashed contact numbers for viewers interested in registering.

¶4. (SBU) PSUV registration expanded May 12 and 13 to the states of Anzoategui, Aragua, Carabobo, Amazonas, and Bolivar. Minister of Popular Power for Foreign Affairs Nicolas Maduro and former Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel were among the prominent Chavistas who registered for the PSUV during the May 12-13 weekend. PSUV organizers declared the third weekend a success, and claimed to have registered 1.3 million voters by May 13. PolCouns observed a well-organized party registration drive in progress in Anzoategui state. Small groups of red-shirted party promoters walked door-to-door handing out new t-shirts to encourage registration. Poloff observed on May 13 a well-organized but sparsely-attended party registration drive at a Caracas park. PSUV expands to all 23 states May 19-20, continues in 19 states the following weekend, and finishes June 2-3 in 14 states.

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The Heat Is On  
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¶5. (SBU) Opposition union leaders denounced the week of May 7 active BRV efforts to force government employees and contractors to join the PSUV. Alfredo Ramos, a former Causa

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R National Assembly deputy, told the media May 8 that employees in numerous state enterprises, the Caracas boroughs controlled by pro-Chavez mayors, and three federal ministries have complained of being ordered to join the PSUV. Local media have printed copies of written memos from the Autonomos Institute of State Railroads, the Caracas Metropolitan Police, and dependencies of state oil company PDVSA instructing employees to register with the PSUV. Federal government employees told poloff that they have been told by their bosses to join the PSUV or risk losing their jobs. Carabobo Governor Luis Felipe Acosta reportedly announced that he would be pleased to accept the resignation of state employees who do not want to follow the policy lines of Chavez.

¶6. (SBU) PSUV organizers are making tepid denials about government pressure to join the PSUV. The pro-government daily "Vea" ran the headline "Unacceptable to Pressure" on May 10. "Vea" editor, Guillermo Garcia Ponce, one of the PSUV's national promoters, reassured that registration for the PSUV is "absolutely voluntary." In his May 13 comments to the media, Foreign Minister Maduro denied reports that the government is coercing people to join the PSUV, and blamed such reports on the opposition's inability to understand the working classes' "love of country and love for Chavez." Opposition critics note that the belated PSUV/BRV "clarifications" have had a chilling effect by reinforcing a growing perception that government employees need to join the PSUV to protect their jobs.

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Blasting the Hold-Outs  
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¶7. (SBU) President Chavez continues to skewer the leaders and members of three small, but prominent, pro-Chavez parties that have refused to dissolve to make way unconditionally for

the PSUV -- Patria Para Todos (PPT), Podemos, and the Communist Party (PCV). During his May 5 press conference on the margins of registering for the PSUV, Chavez stated plainly "whoever is against the United Socialist Party of Venezuela is against Chavez, simply said." He accused the Communist Party of behaving like the opposition party Accion Democratica (AD) for expelling 13 Central Committee members after they said they would join the PSUV. He reiterated that Sucre Governor Ramon Martinez of Podemos should "reflect" on joining the PSUV, or at a minimum, stop criticizing the PSUV formation process.

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Ideology To Come  
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¶8. (SBU) During the same May 5 press encounter, Chavez revealed a little more of what he expects the ideology and structure of the PSUV to be. Chavez said the ideas of Karl Marx, particularly the "thesis of the transition of capitalism to socialism," should be an "essential ingredient" in the "battle of ideas" within the PSUV. At the same time, he warned against excessive "dogmatism" and treating Marx's writings like "sacred writings." He called on new party members to "raise the flags of socialism" and citing Trotsky, said the Revolution is a permanent process of transformation. Chavez also insisted that the PSUV should be a "mass party" that also generates "truly revolutionary" leadership. He stressed that persons who join are "aspirants to militancy," without yet defining how one qualifies to become a party "militant," or what additional benefits "militants" will enjoy.

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Opposition Criticism  
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¶9. (SBU) While the toughest criticism of the PSUV formation process to date has come from small, pro-Chavez parties, opposition parties and media in recent weeks have stepped their criticism. In particular, the opposition is arguing that the PSUV is receiving special treatment from the CNE and privileged access to public spaces. A CNE rector responded that any party can seek CNE support for party registration on a reimbursable basis, but no one has explained how a party that does not yet officially exist is paying for six weekends of CNE support throughout Venezuela. In addition, the opposition is expressing concern that the BRV intends to use the PSUV party registration list as a litmus test for

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allocating government jobs, contracts, and benefits. The PSUV list would thus update the "Tascon List," which the BRV has used to discriminate against persons who signed the recall petition against President Chavez.

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Comment  
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¶10. (C) While conceding some initial logistical hiccups, Chavez' supporters continue to voice confidence publicly and privately that the PSUV formation process is going well. Chavistas' bravado notwithstanding, the reality is the BRV has had to channel substantial government resources and apply pressure to get the PSUV registration drive on track. Such tactics, so far, appear to have elicited compliance amid weak opposition, although creating additional resentment, particularly among government workers. The PSUV registration drive is also highlighting the extent to which state and political party are likely to become fused, with correspondingly deleterious consequences for democracy in Venezuela. While registering for the PSUV, Chavez casually mentioned the goal of creating a "party-government, together with the people."

